

## 2002 Session Review



Washington State Senator

# Don Carlson



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**Legislative leadership:**

- Senate Republican assistant floor leader

**Senate committee assignments:**

- Education
- Higher Education
- Human Services and Corrections

**Other committee assignments:**

- Western Interstate Commission on Higher Education
- Joint Committee on Pension Policy
- Oral History Review Board

Dear friends,

The state Legislature concluded its 2002 session in Olympia on March 14, the last day of the scheduled 60-day session. The Legislature accomplished a lot during those 60 days, enacting a supplemental operating budget, a statewide transportation funding plan, and a capital construction budget that will add about 1,800 private sector jobs to the workforce.

These and other issues are covered inside this newsletter.

If you have questions or comments about any of the issues that were before the Legislature this year, feel free to share them with me. Also, if you need help in dealing with a problem regarding a state government agency, don't hesitate to contact me for assistance. If you would like your name added to my e-mail update list, please provide your e-mail address to my legislative assistant, Donna Sorrell, at [sorrell\\_do@leg.wa.gov](mailto:sorrell_do@leg.wa.gov) or (360) 786-7696.

It is a privilege and honor to serve as your state senator.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Don Carlson".

### Supplemental operating budget is unsustainable

The Legislature began the 2002 session facing a \$1.2 billion operating budget deficit. By the end of February, the deficit had grown to \$1.6 billion following the latest state revenue forecast and revised state caseload projections.

The budget crisis required a hard look at state spending and what should be reduced or eliminated. While the supplemental operating budget does include several spending reductions, it fails to follow a simple budgetary rule — don't spend more than you have.

The budget appropriates \$22.457

billion for spending. Available revenues for it are estimated at \$21.045 billion. That means the budget spends about \$1.4 billion more than the state is receiving in revenues. As a result, I voted against the operating budget.

By not fixing the budget right and not keeping spending within our means, we're heading toward an even larger budget crisis next year. Even under the best-case scenario, the budget by next year still will spend about \$1 billion more than the state will have in revenue.

*(continued)*

### Budget *(continued)*

Another problem with the budget is that it sells off a portion of the future money from the state's share of the multi-billion dollar tobacco lawsuit settlement in exchange for \$450 million now. Using the tobacco money for bonding is a gimmick. We shouldn't use one-time money for ongoing spending needs. It just sets us up for a larger budget disaster in the future.



The operating budget does take some steps to reduce costs, including a salary freeze for state employees, with the exception of the scheduled 3.6 percent raise for K-12 teachers and community and technical college faculty, as called for by Initiative 732. Other cost-cutting steps taken include:

- A 3 percent cut in funding for state agencies and a 5 percent reduction for the House and Senate;
- A 10 percent reduction in travel costs; and
- Freezing all equipment purchases.

However, many additional steps should have been taken to reduce nonessential spending. Senate Republicans offered several common-sense ways, totaling about \$1.5 billion, to reduce spending. These options included freezing hiring in nonessential services, implementing the state auditor's findings about Basic Health Plan enrollee fraud, reducing spending for miscellaneous

goods and services, suspending purchases of nonessential furnishings and equipment, reducing in-state and out-of-state travel, reducing spending for training retreats and conferences, and reducing legislators' mailing budgets by \$6,850 each.

These are common-sense ways to reduce spending without hurting important services. In tough budget times like this, they should have been utilized.

The original budget being considered this session would have eliminated the three learning improvement days for teachers. However, the approved budget restores two of the learning improvement days. The budget also included \$6 million for retaining high-quality faculty at our four-year state colleges and universities, but that money was vetoed by the governor.

### College tuition to be increased

Because of the budget crisis, colleges and universities face across-the-board budget cuts that will amount to \$54 million. This means

community colleges will need to cut 3 percent from their budgets

and public four-year institutions will have to cut 5 percent from their budgets.

At the same time, the budget situation also forced the Legislature to increase tuition:

- By 12 percent at Clark College and other community and technical colleges;
- By 14 percent at Western Washington University, Central Washington University, Eastern Washington University and The Evergreen State College; and
- By 16 percent at the University of Washington and Washington State University.

While the tuition increases will make it harder for students to afford college, the Legislature decided the tuition hikes were a better alternative than further eliminating classes or otherwise reducing the quality of our state's higher education system.





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### Washington voters to have final say on statewide transportation funding package

Traffic congestion has been an increasing problem here in Vancouver and other growing areas in Washington. In fact, the Seattle-Everett area has the second-worst traffic in the nation, and Tacoma ranks 37<sup>th</sup>.

This year the Legislature passed a statewide transportation funding package that is expected to raise \$7.8 billion over the next 10 years. The Legislature also passed a measure allowing residents in King, Pierce and Snohomish counties to vote to raise money necessary to meet that region's enormous transportation needs which can't be met by a statewide funding plan alone.

The statewide funding package

will raise the state gas tax by 9 cents a gallon over the next two years (5 cents next year and another 4 cents in 2004). Other

parts of the revenue package include:

- A 1 percent sales tax increase on new and used vehicles, with that revenue dedicated to transit, passenger-only ferries, rail (not including light rail), paratransit and commute trip reduction efforts;
- A 30 percent increase (phased

in 15 percent annually over two years) on the gross weight fee for commercial trucks weighing more than 10,000 pounds; and

- Dedicating the 6.5 percent sales tax on new transportation construction projects to passenger-only ferries, paratransit, rail and commute trip reduction efforts, beginning in 2006. For the average motorist, the 9-cent gas tax increase would amount to an extra \$68 a year. For someone buying a vehicle, the 1 percent sales tax would cost an average driver \$48 more.

The future of Washington's roads and highways is now in the hands of the state's voters. The funding package will appear as Referendum 51 on the November ballot.



### Capital budget plan includes money for Clark College

By creating 1,800 private sector jobs, the \$2.5 billion capital construction budget approved by the Legislature will give Washington's economy a needed boost. Locally, the capital budget includes funding for the State Patrol's Vancouver crime lab and structural repairs at Clark College.

The capital budget also

provides \$17.7 million for the Columbia River dredging project. This project would allow the river to be dredged another three feet. This would allow larger cargo ships to reach ports along the river, thus helping the region's economy. As many as 100,000 private sector jobs will be affected by the dredging project.



*Greg Pender, a freshman at Jesuit High School, served as a Senate page during the 2002 session. Greg was sponsored by Sen. Carlson.*

## Legislature passes bill targeting school bullies

The Legislature approved a measure mandating anti-bullying policies in Washington schools.

House Bill 1444 defines bullying as any written, verbal or physical act that harms a student, damages a student's property, interferes with a student's education, creates an intimidating or threatening environment or disrupts the orderly operation of a school.

School districts will be required to adopt a policy by Aug. 1, 2003. The superintendent of public instruction will create a model policy.

I voted for this measure when it was in the Senate. While the bill won't prevent bad behavior in

schools, it is important for schools to do all they can to keep students physically and emotionally safe.

## Pension policy committee bill dies at end of session

For several years, I have served as a member of the Joint Committee on Pension Policy (JCPP). As its name implies, this committee studies pension issues for all state pension systems and recommends bills to the Legislature.

This year, the Legislature almost passed Substitute House Bill 3010, which would have created the Select Committee on Pension Policy and repealed the JCPP. The JCPP's responsibilities would have been transferred to the new committee.

However, the measure wasn't approved. On the next to last day of session, the Senate voted 25-23 to pass it, but then it was reconsidered, meaning that the vote was nullified. The bill wasn't brought up for another vote and so it died. I was disappointed that it didn't pass. It would have given members of the retirement systems a chance to give input.

Washington is one of three states that do not allow retirees and active members to have input in the pension policy-making process. This committee in no way would have taken away the authority of the Legislature. It simply would have given members of the retirement systems a voice.

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